

APPEARED

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Spy Suspect Tied to KGB Defection

Ex-U.S. Navy Man in Britain Held After Agent Went to West

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WASHINGTON—A high-ranking Soviet KGB official has defected to the United States from his Athens post, the State Department said Friday, and intelligence officials linked his defection to the arrest in Britain of a retired U.S. Navy commander on espionage charges.

In a departure from its customary silence on such matters, the State Department said KGB Col. Viktor P. Gundarev, his 7-year-old son, Maxim, and Galina N. Gromova, described as a family friend, defected and are now in the United States. They are believed to have asked for asylum last weekend.

A senior Pentagon official described Gundarev, 50, as "quite a find" and said he had worked in the same counterintelligence unit as Vitaly S. Yurchenko, the high-ranking KGB official who defected to the United States last summer and then returned to the Soviet Union, claiming that he had been drugged and held forcibly by the CIA.

Allegedly Tried to Flee

At the same time, intelligence officials, speaking on condition that they not be identified by name, said the arrest last Sunday of retired U.S. Navy Cmdr. John Bothwell as he allegedly tried to flee Britain was linked to Gundarev's defection.

Bothwell, 59, who maintained residences in Britain and Greece, was arraigned Friday in a London court on espionage charges, the first time the case had come to public notice. Confederates had warned Bothwell of Gundarev's defection, but not in time for him to evade arrest, sources said.

Bothwell was charged under Britain's Official Secrets Act for allegedly preparing on or before Feb. 16 to pass sensitive information to an unnamed contact "likely to be directly or indirectly useful to an enemy."

Sources who said they knew of Bothwell's activities indicated that he was involved in arranging trade between South Africa and the Soviet Union, two countries that have little open contact. There was no indication of what specific information he was preparing to pass. Nor was the country that allegedly was to receive the information named.

Intelligence Background

The intelligence sources and British police said Bothwell, who left the Navy about 20 years ago, later worked for 10 years for a U.S. intelligence agency, which one source identified as the CIA. A CIA spokeswoman declined to comment.

At the State Department, spokesman Charles Redman said he had no information on Gundarev's wife, but Reuters news service quoted Western sources as saying that she and another child were living in Moscow.

U.S. intelligence sources said they could not confirm a report that Gundarev decided to defect after his wife complained to Soviet authorities about a romantic relationship she said he had with Gromova.

The State Department's announcement on Gundarev's defection was described by one intelligence source as a "well thought out move to shake up the other side's people."

Noting Bothwell's alleged ties to Gundarev, one source asked, "Can you imagine being an intelligence agent that Gundarev could identify and not receiving a (warning) call?"

The New York Times reported earlier this week that Gundarev's defection apparently was linked to a weekend incident involving reported Soviet surveillance of the U.S. Embassy in Athens.

Quoting police sources, the report said the U.S. Embassy placed its security personnel on alert a week ago and called in police after two Soviet Embassy cars were spotted circling the premises.

Bothwell, tanned and gray-haired, sat quietly during a 30-minute court appearance in

London on Friday, listening to a magistrate deny his application for bail. He made no statement but smiled to his British-born wife, Ann, as he entered the court in a checked sport coat and carrying a copy of the late Robert Graves' novel, "I, Claudius."

The section of the Official Secrets Act under which Bothwell is charged carries a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment. Police officials said further charges might be lodged against him.

Other officials said Bothwell, who maintained homes in the west English city of Bath and in Athens, began operating as a middleman in international trade about 12 years ago.

A domestic British news agency, Central News, reported that statements made to the court since Bothwell's arrest indicated that he had strong ties with Soviet trade officials in London, as well as contacts with Western embassies in several European capitals.

Navy records indicate that a John Henry Bothwell enlisted in the Navy on his 17th birthday on June 30, 1943, during World War II and spent 22 years in the service. The Navy was unable to confirm, however, that the man arrested in Britain was the same Bothwell.

John Henry Bothwell's service duty included stints as the skipper of two U.S. submarines, the Tilefish, for four months in 1954 and the Ronquil, from 1959 through 1961.

A native of Shenectady, N. Y., John Henry Bothwell was an instructor at the Navy's school at San Diego on countering anti-submarine warfare for a total of three years in the 1960s. He also was assigned to the Navy War College at Carlisle, Pa., and served as a submarine navigator.

He was graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and received a master of arts degree in international affairs from George Washington University in the District of Columbia. According to the Navy records, he received five medals and left the service as a commander on July 31, 1961.

Ronald J. Ostrow reported from Washington and Tyler Marshall from London. Times staff writer James Gerstenzang, in Washington, also contributed to this article.